

29 November 1966

SOVIET REACTIONS TO US DEPLOYMENT OF NIKE-X

The Problem

What do we believe the Soviet reaction to deployment of the Nike-X would be?

1. Any consideration of this problem must begin on the warning note that it is quite impossible to predict with any certainty how the Soviets will react to any given US program, if at all. US ABM deployment is likely to have wide repercussions throughout the Soviet planning establishment because it is a major new program with potential impact on the strategic situation, but the specific Soviet responses will be affected by a variety of strategic, technical, and economic considerations. Uncertainty is also injected into this problem because our present evidence does not define the exact scope and magnitude of the military programs the Soviets have already decided on. Thus as we watch the Soviet programs proceed it may be very hard to tell the extent to which they may represent Soviet reactions.

2. This issue for US policy arises at a time when the Soviets are embarked on a more rapid ICBM program than ever before. We

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think this program is designed to give them, by 1968, much greater confidence in their ability to deter the US by virtue of the capability of their ICBM force to inflict mass destruction on the US even if we attacked first. Beyond that time, we have estimated that the Soviets will consider alternative courses of action with respect to ICBM programming, depending in part on the course of US military programs. They may decide that there is little strategic advantage in going on to build a significantly larger ICBM force, or they may seek to strengthen their deterrent and military power still more by increasing their ICBM force to about the size of the one planned by the US. In any case, they will probably introduce improved systems with greater survivability and greater striking effectiveness. These latter could include a variety of advanced guidance systems, sophisticated re-entry vehicles, and penetration aids. We presume the Soviets are already investigating such improvements, but they have not brought them to the flight-test stage as yet.

3. The status of Soviet strategic defense programs presents a greater problem. We know the Soviets have conducted a long and intensive R and D program in the ABM field. We know also that they took the decision to begin at least limited ABM deployment four or more years ago, and that since then they have been constructing ABM defenses for the Moscow area. These defenses will begin to be

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operational in the next year or so. At present there is no indication that this system is being installed anywhere else in the USSR. But another new defense system has been under construction at a number of locations since 1964, and we cannot now estimate with high confidence whether it is designed to defend against ballistic missiles or aerodynamic vehicles. The evidence we have leads me to believe it is an improved defense against high-speed, high-altitude aircraft and air-to-surface missiles. Gen. Carroll, however, believes it is more likely to be an ABM system (with an additional capability against high-flying supersonic aerodynamic vehicles), and this is a possibility which I cannot rule out.

4. The implications of my view are that the Soviets have a limited ABM deployment at Moscow but are very unlikely to have any other locations defended by operational ABM defenses until the early 1970's. If I am mistaken about the other system, however, then the implications are that the Soviets are already well along in building widespread ABM defenses. We have both agreed, however, that the Soviets will go on seeking to develop improved ABM capabilities. We have also considered that the Soviets might decide that ABM deployment for the general defense of the USSR is too costly, but that, all things considered, they will probably decide to extend

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such defenses. We think, however, that they will be prepared to adjust whatever program they pursue on the basis of a number of factors including the US reaction to developments in their own strategic programs.

5. We believe that the immediate Soviet reaction to a US decision to deploy would be influenced more by the decision itself -- which would be reported fully in US news media -- than by the announced size of the US program. The Soviets would be unlikely to accept US explanations that any such program was intended primarily to counter the type of threat which may eventually be posed by Communist China. We think that they almost certainly would view any US program for ballistic missile defenses as a move to reduce the effectiveness of Soviet strategic attack forces and would take into account its possible effect upon the Soviet strategic position. Of course, when we actually begin to deploy, they will follow it in detail through satellite reconnaissance.

6. The Soviets would view the decision as evidence that the US was intent on maintaining its strategic position vis-a-vis the USSR. They would judge that this meant the US was willing to see a continuation of the arms race, or at least saw no way to avert it. The Soviets might interpret the decision as a move to force them to make military expenditures which would keep their economy

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under strain.] They might view the move as a sign that the US considered nuclear war somewhat more likely over the longer term, especially if the announcement came at a time of crisis, in Vietnam, or elsewhere. Associated US expenditures for a shelter program would probably strengthen the voice of those Soviets advocating this interpretation.

7. In assessing the impact of the US decision, the Soviets would be influenced by the value which they attach to ABM defenses as well as by the status of their own program. The ABM deployment described above indicates a strong Soviet desire to obtain at least some early missile defenses. If the Soviet program is well advanced at the time the US decision is announced, they would probably take a calmer view of the US move than if their deployment were more limited. It is possible that they would see the US announcement as having been precipitated by Soviet claims in the area of missile defense.

8. The Soviets certainly have considered in their military planning the likelihood that the US might eventually build ABM defenses. Actual US deployment of an ABM system would probably elicit an increase in Soviet attack capabilities in a variety of ways including development of sophisticated reentry vehicles and penetration aids. The Soviets could also expand their ICBM and SLBM development

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program beyond present plans, whatever they may be -- US ABM deployment is one of the factors which could cause the Soviet missile force to approach the high side of our ICBM estimate for the period beyond 1968. They might also seek to complicate the problem of US ABM defense by intensifying their development of depressed trajectory ICBMs and fractional orbit bombardment systems, with which they are already experimenting. And finally, they might respond by intensifying work on their own ABM program. It should be noted, however, that the Soviets will probably take some of these actions even if the US implements no ballistic missile defense program.

9. Cost will be an important consideration in Soviet ABM programming regardless of what the US does. The Moscow ABM system, as we now see it, will cost some _____ billion dollars over the eight years it is evidently taking to install (1962-70). This year's installation costs are probably only about _____ percent of total estimated Soviet expenditures for strategic defense purposes. A nationwide ABM program would of course be much more expensive. Our rough estimate is that a five-year program to defend, say, 20 to 30 cities would cost the USSR the equivalent of some _____ billion dollars, assuming considerably lower levels of defense than at Moscow.

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10. There is no question that the USSR could afford this or an even larger ABM program. However, there is always the possibility that this plus all the other complex endeavors the Soviets may desire would be more than their taut economy could support. The Soviets evidently plan for an increase in total military expenditures in the current (1966-70) Five Year Plan. The indications are that they want to increase their attention to general purpose forces during this period, though the evidence indicates that what has been stepped up thus far is strategic programs. In this connection, strategic defense has for many years had higher priority in the USSR than in the US and has been about equal to strategic attack in resources allocated. We believe that if Soviet programs prove too costly in the aggregate, or if the growth of the economy falls below Soviet expectations, cutbacks and stretch-outs are more likely to come in general purpose forces and supporting elements than in strategic programs.

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